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RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 1116
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1308
RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND 0328
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000059

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [FJ](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: FIJI UPDATE 1/24/07: RFMF DETAINS CRITICS; UNIONS
ANGRY AT RETIREMENT AGE DIRECTIVE

REF: SUVA 53 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Dinger per 1.5 (B) and (D)

Summary

1. (C) Prominent lawyer Richard Naidu was brought to the army barracks and "given the usual third degree" last night. He will "lay low" for a while but plans to resume public comment. The interim Attorney General suggested that instead of bringing critics up to QEB, the military should let police handle the matter. The RFMF appears to disagree and is reportedly also searching for democracy advocate Angie Heffernan. The public service union is up in arms over plans to lower the retirement age. The PRC Embassy in Suva has not yet been contacted about the planned visit of "high-powered" interim government officials to China and other countries. India's DATT is conveying an RFMF request to New Delhi for additional slots in military schools. End summary.

Naidu Brought to QEB, Military Looking for Other Critics

2. (C) Prominent Lawyer Richard Naidu was taken to QEB the evening of 1/23 after he made remarks to Radio New Zealand stating that President Iloilo is "the military's President, not the Constitution's President." Soldiers surrounded Naidu's home in Suva, and then brought him to the camp for questioning. Naidu told the Ambassador he was "given the usual third degree" by soldiers. He said he planned to lay low for a while, but not too long. "Otherwise, they win," he said.

3. (SBU) RFMF spokesman Leweni said Naidu was brought to QEB because his comments were demeaning and "inciting." Interim Attorney General Aiyaz Sayed Khaiyum, who also criticized Naidu's comments, read a statement suggesting that instead of bringing critics up to QEB, the military should let police handle such cases under the Public Order Act. Leweni defended the military's action, saying Naidu had breached the State of Emergency Decree. "Richard's statements," he said, "were quite bad, and he deserved to be taken to task."

4. (C) Leweni told reporters that the RFMF was also looking for prominent democracy activist Angie Heffernan because of recent statements she has made criticizing the interim government. Heffernan contacted us this afternoon, stating the military went to her house late 1/23. She, her husband and her children evaded the soldiers and drove out of Suva to an undisclosed location in Fiji's west. Heffernan's

organization, the Pacific Center for Public Integrity, closed down temporarily today.

Union Angry at Interim Government

15. (SBU) Representatives of Fiji's Public Service Union criticized plans announced by interim Public Service Minister Bune to lower the civil service retirement age from 60 to 55.

The union head said the minister's announcement was made without prior consultation with the union, and was a breach of the union contract. Union members' rights are being trampled, he said. He noted that the union has various tools potentially at its disposal, including work stoppages.

China Unaware of Planned High-level Trip

16. (C) The DCM at the PRC Embassy in Suva told us today that the Embassy has not yet been contacted about the visit of ministers, senior officials, and business people to China and other countries that Commander Bainimarama announced 1/22. "I read about it in the papers," he said.

RFMF Request to India

17. (C) India's Defense Attache to Fiji, resident in Australia, has been visiting Suva, and he met Bainimarama this week. The India DATT has received, and will convey to New Delhi, a request for additional RFMF slots at Indian military colleges. The Indian DATT expressed concern that Western military sanctions on Fiji are creating a "vacuum" that China will exploit. He urged the U.S. not to be "near sighted" about Fiji.

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